



Bellview United Methodist Church

Love God · Love Others

Some Theological Resources

Differences in Traditional and Progressive Theology

We are sharing these resources developed by Trinity on the Hill UMC in Augusta, GA, Deer Lake UMC, and Killlearn UMC in Tallahassee, FL. We are grateful for these materials from these churches as part our discernment process leading up to our Church Town Hall and Conference.

If you questions about any of these theological resources, please contact Pastor Nancy at 850-456-4828.

Current Status of the United Methodist Church

Trinity on the Hill UMC

Fact Finding Committee
Education/Communication Subcommittee
1.4.22 E

What are the two major perspectives?

Traditionalist

- Historic interpretation of the Bible
- Does not believe in culturally redefining the Bible
- Beliefs align with the current UMC Book of Discipline

Progressive

- Includes a wide range of interpretation and theological ideas (may believe in a few, many, or all views listed)
- Range from moderate to strongly progressive

BOTH GROUPS BELIEVE THEIR VIEW IS TRUE TO THE GOSPEL



Theology - Scripture

TRADITIONAL

- Word of God
- Biblical revelation is complete
- Bible is true & authoritative
- Experience is subject to Scripture

PROGRESSIVE

- Contains word of God
- New revelation takes precedence over old
- Parts of Bible are true; portions can be dismissed as not authoritative; not relevant today
- Experience supersedes Scripture

Not all beliefs are shared, but all are accepted



Theology - Nature & Role of Jesus

TRADITIONAL

- Incarnate (fully human & fully divine)
- Virgin Birth
- Physical Death
- Bodily Resurrection

PROGRESSIVE

- May or may not believe in any or all of these tenets of the Apostles' Creed

Not all beliefs are shared, but all are accepted



Theology - Nature & Role of Sin

TRADITIONAL

- Personal, separates us from God
- Requires atonement
- Forgiveness comes from faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus

PROGRESSIVE

- Societal from external forces
- No original sin (Man is inherently good)
- It is possible for sin to be corrected through works of justice & mercy
- Jesus' death on the cross is not necessary for atonement

Not all beliefs are shared, but all are accepted



Theology - Salvation

TRADITIONAL

- Precious gift received in response to God's grace
- Only comes through faith in Jesus

PROGRESSIVE

- Universal Salvation; all receive salvation regardless of belief
- More than one path to salvation

Not all beliefs are shared, but all are accepted



UMC Book of Discipline

TRADITIONAL

- Language related to human sexuality should remain the same
- Marriage in the church is between a man and a woman

PROGRESSIVE

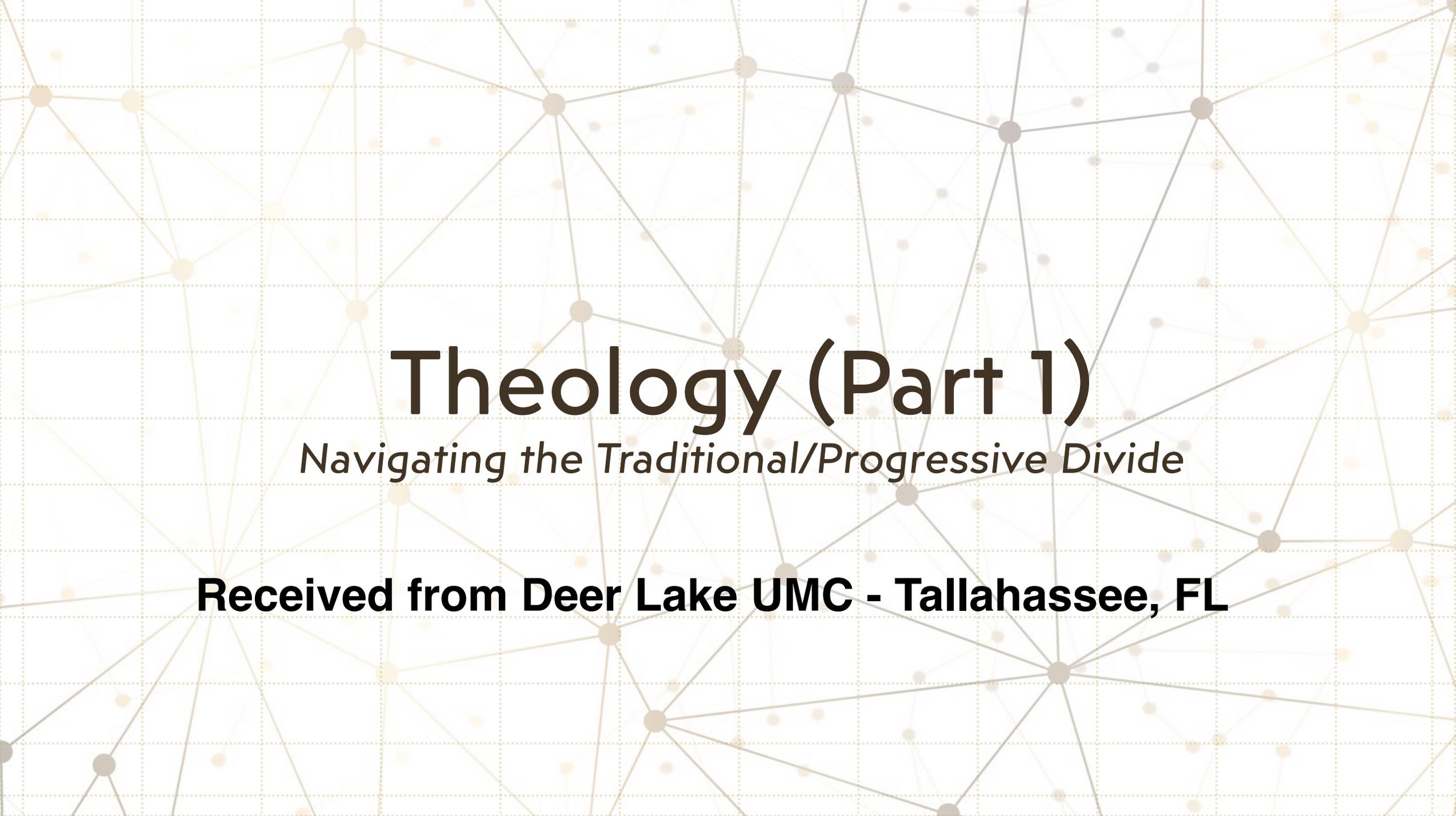
- All language related to human sexuality should be removed
- Allows for same sex marriage and ordination of practicing homosexuals

Not all beliefs are shared, but all are accepted



Irreconcilable Positions

- Theological orientations are significantly different
- Both groups believe their own perspective is true to the gospel



Theology (Part 1)

Navigating the Traditional/Progressive Divide

Received from Deer Lake UMC - Tallahassee, FL

A Tale of Three “Ortho’s” (right)

Orthodoxy (right belief)

- Without orthodoxy our witness is misdirected

Orthopathy (right feeling)

- Without orthopraxy our witness is just mean

Orthopraxy (right practice)

- Without orthopraxy our witness is meaningless (we may live by faith and not by sight, but the rest of the world lives by what they see and hear and feel)

Working Definitions

- **Traditional Theology** - a theological perspective in which what's been passed down through the Bible is true, can be trusted as good for human flourishing, and to be shared in every culture, for every culture.
- **Progressive Theology** - a theological perspective in which what's been passed down through the Bible is to be reexamined as necessary, and if needed, reimaged by each culture, for each culture, for the purpose of human flourishing.

Some Contrasting Views

Traditional theology isn't opposed to revision or critique, so long as the changes come from within the scriptures themselves. The Bible says way more than we think it says, but it can't say anything we want. When the Bible and culture disagree, traditional theology would choose to hold to what has been passed down and seek to better understand the tension without revising interpretation.

Progressive theology is open to the possibility that something passed down is true, but only so much as what is passed down is aligned with our modern scientific understandings. When we learn something new about the world, interpretive revision is welcome since the Biblical writers couldn't possibly have known about it.

Contrasting Views Cont.

Traditional theology, generally says, *"What was, is."*

Something is true because it is always true and will continue to be true. It is true because it is contained within the scriptures and as such, generations of Christians before us have held to it. Therefore, even when we come across something we we don't like or know what to do with in God's word, we must learn to stand under it, even if we don't understand it.

Progressive theology, generally says, *"What was, was."*

Something isn't true simply because we thought it was true for a long time. Something is true if it meets the standards of progress and aligns with the newly acquired knowledge we've uncovered in the sciences (think biology, sociology, anthropology, etc.)

Contrasting Views Cont.

Traditional theology *tends* to start with the Bible and then work from there into the sciences or whatever issue may be being discussed.

This gets dangerous when we force the Bible into conversations it was never intended to have (think the Genesis 1 debates).

Progressive theology *tends* to start with the sciences and works backwards into the Bible from there.

This gets dangerous because things like science and cultural norms/values become the authority over our lives rather than God's word.

Contrasting Views Cont.

Traditional View - Scripture should interpret scripture – yes.

Scripture is set *alongside* scripture within the overarching whole of scripture. The new refines the old, not as its replacement, but as its fulfillment. The new reveals the heart-trajectory of God rather than the obsolescence of what was. Not everything in the Bible applies in the same way it once applied, but it is still God's holy, inspired word.

Progressive View - Scripture should interpret scripture – yes.

However, scripture is set *against* scripture with what is new or more culturally consistent trumping and replacing the old/inconsistent. Anything contained within God's word that proves to be outdated or irrelevant can (and should) be rejected.

Contrasting Views Cont.

Traditional View - Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment, goal and guide for the Bible.

The whole story of the Bible is leading to and from Jesus. Jesus is the Word of God who helps us understand God's word (the Bible).

Progressive View - Jesus is the ultimate filter by which we read everything in the Bible.

Anything before or after Him is subject to revision based on who we understand Him to be. Jesus is often set against the scriptures themselves as evidence of why they are no longer needed, relevant, or to be applied.

Positives to Progressive and Traditional Perspectives

Traditional

- Strong emphasis on scriptural authority and the importance of being biblically literate
- Larger focus on discipleship, responsibility, and accountability – addressing *sin* on a personal level.
- Theological grounding has deeper roots with more historical backing
- Greater consistency regarding the message of Christ crucified, risen, and returning.

Progressive

- Strong emphasis on justice, mercy and the idea of God's kingdom and rule here and now
- Willingness to address *Sin* as a systemic issue embedded within our world
- Directed focus on reconciliation and making space for all people in the community of God's family
- Greater flexibility and openness to change when it comes to methods and forms of gathering